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men fear to tread; and although Mendelssohn felt his utter incapacity to grapple with the comparatively simple subject of the *Tempest*, Ambrose Thomas does not think that the profoundly philosophical play of *Hamlet* is too much for him. Believing, as we do, that an artist should be judged by results, we can scarcely see why the excessive difficulty he has had to contend with should be pleaded as an excuse for failure: the selection of the subject rests with himself; and if the weakest parts of his work are precisely those where strength is most needed, it is an undoubted proof that his ambition has blinded him to his want of power. Whatever success M. Thomas has achieved in his new Opera, is mainly owing to his heroine. A more perfect *Ophelia* than Madlle. Nilsson can scarcely be imagined. In every respect she is the pure and confiding girl of Shakspeare's creation; and her lovely voice lends such a charm to the heart-broken vocal passages in which she, half unconsciously, sings her grief, that we forget the excessive mechanical difficulties surmounted by the artist in our deep sympathy with the woman. Never, indeed, can we recall a more poetical realisation of this beautiful character; nor can we recollect any instance where the efforts of the actress were more warmly appreciated by the audience. But an Opera in five acts, which, with numerous curtailments, takes four hours to perform, cannot be carried into popularity by Madlle. Nilsson alone; and we much question whether *Ophelia's* Scena in the fourth act will compensate for the enormous quantity of weary music which precedes it. As usual, in modern operas, we have no overture. A brief prelude, in E flat minor, announces the mysterious nature of the work; and after a bright but common-place march, the curtain rises to a chorus. A very pleasing and melodious duet between *Ophelia* and *Hamlet* then occurs, which was much applauded, as it deserved to be. Passing over a poor Cavatina for *Laertes*, the next piece of any importance is a chorus of officers and pages, so bright and cheerful as to create an evident wish for an *encore*. In the scene where the *Ghost* appears, the feebleness of the composer is first really shown. To realise by music a feeling akin to that which Shakspeare has realised by poetry, where *Hamlet* first encounters the spectre, requires no ordinary genius; and we are not therefore surprised that this scene is ushered in by a mere melodramatic "hurry," in which recourse is had to the chromatic scale, which (like theatrical thunder and lightning before the commission of a crime) always foreshadows the supernatural. Some very excellent declamatory passages are here given to *Hamlet*; and although the general effect to the audience throughout this scene is one of dullness, there is perhaps more dramatic feeling shown here than in any other part of the opera. The air for *Ophelia*, containing a charming vocal phrase, in A flat minor, leads to an *Allegro*, in which the clear upper notes of Madlle. Nilsson were displayed to the utmost advantage. An air for the *Queen* is followed by some concerted music, which produced but little effect; the next noticeable point being a Bacchanalian song, excellently sung by Mr. Santley, and some well-written dramatic bits in *Hamlet's* interview with the players. The scene in the King's palace, where the play is acted, is chiefly remarkable for some bustling concerted music, which, however, never rises to a high level. We will say nothing of the well-known speech, "To be, or not to be," which, translated into Italian, and set to music, produced an almost ludicrous effect upon the audience, for which the composer has only himself to blame. In the scene between *Hamlet* and the *Queen* some very impassioned music occurs, and excellently sung as it was by Madlle. Sinico and Mr. Santley, the curtain descended to very considerable applause. The fourth act is the gem of the Opera and the culminating point of Madlle. Nilsson's triumph. After a short ballet, the Scena for *Ophelia* commences and lasts through the rest of the act. No words can express the extreme refinement of Madlle. Nilsson's singing in this scene, in which we may say that the music, if not great, is at least appropriate; much of the beauty of the Scena, however, being

dependent upon the introduction of a charmingly plaintive Swedish melody, which is woven in with admirable effect. The whole of this scene is thoroughly Shakspearian in feeling; and we need hardly say that the delight of the audience could scarcely be restrained within bounds, the fall of the curtain raising a storm of applause which could only be appeased by Madlle. Nilsson appearing three times on the stage to curtsy her acknowledgments. The fifth act contains merely the Funeral March and chorus, with the murder of the King, and a short piece of mad declamation for *Hamlet*; but after the excitement caused by the music of the preceding act, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the last scene should produce but little sensation. Throughout the Opera, Mr. Santley sang the music of *Hamlet* to perfection; and his acting was almost equal to his singing. Signor Ciampi as the *Ghost*, and Signori Tagliafico and Marino in the small parts of *Horatio* and *Marcellus*, were thoroughly efficient; Signor Corsi also singing the Cavatina given to *Laertes* with much effect. The chorus was excellent; and the scenery, especially the view of the brook, with the overhanging willows, in the highest style of art. Signor Arditi conducted with the utmost care and judgment; and to him much of the success of the performance was owing.

THE ORATORIO CONCERTS.

A FINE performance of Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*, was given at the last of these subscription Concerts, on the 9th ult., at St. James's Hall. We have rarely heard Mr. Sims Reeves sing with more intensity of feeling than in the highly dramatic Recitative of Stephen, "Men, brethren and fathers;" nor, indeed, do we believe it possible for the tender air, "Be thou faithful," to be more perfectly rendered than it was on this occasion, the exquisite violoncello *obbligato* of Mr. Collins also lending so powerful an aid to the general effect as to rouse the audience to enthusiasm. In the soprano music, Madame Lemmens-Sherington sang with her usual earnestness and purity of style; and if in the air, "Jerusalem," we felt the want of that deep religious fervour which the subject demands, we had in its place the most finished artistic expression. Mr. Lewis Thomas gave the utmost effect to the whole of the bass part, singing the somewhat thankless declamatory air, "Consume them all," with that energy which only a thoroughly-trained vocalist dare attempt, and giving also the more subdued solos with an equal amount of success. The contralto air, "But the Lord is mindful," received the utmost justice from Madlle. Drasdil; and Mr. Montem Smith was highly effective in the whole of the tenor Recitatives entrusted to him. The subordinate parts were efficiently filled by Mr. Chaplin Henry and Mr. J. T. Beale. The most difficult choruses were given best; many of the points where indecision is so frequently observable being taken up with surprising firmness. The chorales shewed the equality of tone in the choir to the utmost advantage; and although in our opinion they were scarcely sufficiently subdued, the justness of intonation rendered them at least thoroughly satisfactory to musical ears. In every respect the fine chorus which ends the first part, "O great is the depth," was a marvel of excellent singing, both for power and precision, and the applause with which it was greeted proved unmistakably its effect upon the audience. On the 15th ult., an extra Concert, for the Director's benefit, was given, when Handel's *Jephtha* was repeated. This magnificent work, with which the Oratorio Concerts commenced, on the 5th February last, achieved a success so decisive as to render a second performance of it during the present season most welcome. Unfortunately Mr. Sims Reeves was not able to attend (in consequence of acute inflammation of the eyes) but his place was supplied by Mr. Vernon Rigby, who gave the whole of the music with such effect as to advance him materially in the estimation of all competent judges, as an intellectual

exponent of the highest class of sacred music. The well-known air, "Waft her, angels," was a genuine success; and the audience would scarcely rest contented with his mere acknowledgment of the overwhelming applause with which he was greeted. Herr Carl Stepan fully sustained his reputation in the bass part; and Miss Julia Elton sang the music of *Storge* with much dramatic power and expression, the passages lying more thoroughly within her register than in that of Madlle. Drasdil, who on the former occasion was the representative of the part. Miss Banks was everything that could be desired in the music of *Iphis* (the beautiful air, "Farewell, ye limpid springs," being sung with the utmost pathos), and Miss Annie Sinclair gave the recitatives allotted to her with much intelligence and expression. We have before spoken of the success of the choir in the fine choruses with which this Oratorio abounds; and have only to say that on this occasion the effect of Handel's massive writing—especially in the overwhelming chorus, "When His loud voice,"—was even greater than before, the audience indeed prolonging the applause with a perseverance worthy of a better object, considering that the object was to effect a repetition of the entire chorus, to the utter destruction of the general effect of the work. We are glad to find that these Concerts have been so successful that nine more will be given, commencing in December next. Amongst the works to be performed, Bach's *Passion Music*, Spohr's *Last Judgment*, Beethoven's Mass in D, and the *Choral Symphony*, Handel's *Dettingen Te Deum*, *Acis and Galatea*, and one of his lesser known Oratorios are named, such promise showing an amount of enterprise which cannot be too highly praised. Mr. Barnby has well earned his position; for apart from his having produced, with the utmost success, seven great musical works within less than six months, we have to thank him for proving the practical advantage of adhering to the *diapason normal*, and for steadily resisting the system of encores, two reforms which, however desirable they may have been considered, have never before been unflinchingly carried out.

PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY.

At the Sixth Concert, which took place at St. James's Hall, on the 31st May, the Symphonies were Haydn's, in B flat, known as "La Reine de France"—a work although somewhat weak, historically interesting, as having been produced before the celebrated twelve, composed for London—and Beethoven's, in B flat (No. 4). An orchestral novelty was the Prelude to Wagner's *Lohengrin*, which produced so decided an effect upon the audience as to be unanimously encored; thus proving that the indefinite period so often named as "the future" has already commenced. How this specimen of the compositions of so innovative a writer as Wagner ever crept into the programme of a conservative Society like the Philharmonic, it is impossible to conjecture; but certain it is that so original and thoughtful a piece of orchestral colouring, resembling in its dreamy beauty the glowing pictures of that daring artist Turner—which were also for some time works of "the future"—must inevitably assert itself, by virtue of that innate power over human sympathies which defies all the canons of criticism ever laid down by artistic law-givers. M. Vieuxtemps' interpretation of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, scarcely realised the intellectual beauties of the work to the fullest extent; but for facility of execution, and perfect command over the mechanical difficulties which it contains, his performance of the entire composition was everything that could be desired. Weber's Concert-Stück was played with the utmost delicacy, and with much dramatic feeling, by Fräulein Mehlig, who seemed thoroughly to enter into the spirit of the little story which it was the object of the composer to illustrate. The vocalists were Madame Volpini and Mr. Santley, the latter of whom gave a Canto Infernale, "Lucifero," by A. Graffigna, which, in spite of excellent singing, produced but little effect. The seventh

Concert took place on the 14th ult., when Professor Bennett's Symphony in G minor, composed expressly for the Society in 1864, was performed with marked success. Every movement was well played, and received with the warmest applause, the Minuet so thoroughly charming every hearer as to be re-demanded with enthusiasm. At the end of the Symphony Professor Bennett was called forward to receive the congratulations which he had so thoroughly earned. The other Symphony was Beethoven's "Eroica," which under Mr. Cusins' careful direction, went admirably. Again Madame Norman-Neruda delighted everybody by her exquisite violin playing, although we should have been additionally pleased to hear her in better music than Rode's Seventh Concerto. The vocalists were Madame Monbelli and Signor Verger. One more extract from Wagner's works, the vigorous March in *Tannhäuser*, played the audience out.

THE CHARITY CHILDREN AT ST. PAUL'S.

THIS Annual Meeting—always an interesting event, and one of the few Festivals to which the residents of the metropolis have to look forward—took place on the 3rd ult., under the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. The singing of the Hundredth Psalm was in every respect fully equal to that on any former occasion; the four trumpets, combined with the organ, in the last verse, producing a thrilling effect upon the vast body of listeners. The responses were, as usual, by Tallis, and the Psalms were sung to Dr. Crotch's slow chant, the children joining in the *Gloria Patri* at the conclusion of each. Mr. Goss's admirable "Te Deum" and "Jubilate" were finely given; the organ accompaniment being excellently played by Mr. George Cooper. Handel's "Zadok, the priest," before the prayer for the Queen, (the organ accompaniment played as a duet by Messrs. Goss and George Cooper), and the Chorale, from *St. Paul*, "Sleepers, wake," which preceded the Sermon, were sung with the utmost precision and power; and after the Sermon, Dr. Croft's setting of some verses of the 104th Psalm again gave the young choristers an opportunity of showing their vocal powers. The "Hallelujah Chorus," from the *Messiah*, was given at the conclusion of the service, and formed a fitting climax to a performance which reflected the utmost credit upon all concerned.

GENOA.

On the 26th May, a performance of Rossini's *Messe Solennelle* was given at the Paganini Theatre, under the direction of three Maestri; one of them having the drilling of the orchestra, the other of the chorus, and the third the general conductorship, on the night of performance. With so much pains bestowed, every regard was had to the complete execution of a work that has lately been gaining so much public attention; and to the indefatigable exertions in preparing the band and chorus beforehand, much credit is due. Nevertheless, owing to the mistaken times in which certain of the movements were given, and to the extreme inefficiency of the solo vocalists, the general effect was anything but satisfactory. However, the previous interest excited in the work of Italy's lately-deceased composer, caused the audience to be an overflowing one; and the choral portions were received with due admiration. As usual, the energetic exertions of Maestro Lavagnino in the less-apparent but thoroughly indispensable labours of pre-superintendence were not spared; and to these were mainly owing the orchestral and choral efficiency on the present occasion. The spirited Fugue, "Cum sancto," and the gracefully effective "Sanctus," received the tribute of an *encore* from the assembled auditory.

On the 31st May, an Instrumental Concert was given in the Ridotto of the Carlo Felice Opera-house, with the view of feeling the musical pulse of the Genoese public, as to whether the establishment of a Quartett Society would be likely to prove successful. The pieces chosen